

Musicking—the meanings of performing and listening. A lecture

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ABSTRACT *The essence of music lies not in musical works but in taking part in performance, in social action. Music is thus not so much a noun as a verb, 'to music'. To music is to take part in any capacity in a musical performance, and the meaning of musicking lies in the relationships that are established between the participants by the performance. Musicking is part of that iconic, gestural process of giving and receiving information about relationships which unites the living world, and it is in fact a ritual by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to other human beings and to the rest of the world. These ideal relationships are often extremely complex, too complex to be articulated in words, but they are articulated effortlessly by the musical performance, enabling the participants to explore, affirm and celebrate them. Musicking is thus as central in importance to our humanness as is taking part in speech acts, and all normally endowed human beings are born capable of taking part in it, not just of understanding the gestures but of making their own.*

I offer here some thoughts on some abiding issues concerning the nature of the musical act and its function in human life. I have been thinking about this for the last few years as I have been writing my third book, which bears the same title as this paper—*Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. In doing so I make no claim to speak *ex cathedra* or to tell anyone what they ought or ought not to be doing; rather I want to offer such philosophical support as I can in these confused and worrying times to those who are actually out there doing the work, to clarify as best I can the reasons why I am certain that music is of central importance in human life and to be defended stoutly, not only in the education of the young but as a lifelong practice.

For more years than I care to think about I have been worrying away at the question, or rather, a pair of questions: "What is the nature of music?" and "What is the function of music in human life?"—in the life, that is, of every single member of the human species? I have reached some tentative conclusions. I make no apology for throwing my

two cents' worth into a pair of questions that seem to have defeated some of the best minds in Western thought, at least since the time of Plato, since I feel I do have something to contribute to the formulation of the questions and possibly even to the quest for an answer.

In the search of that answer I have, over the years, read as widely as I could in the philosophy, the aesthetics and history, and the sociology of music, and while I have found much of interest and flashes of insight, and even sometimes a kind of beauty, I have found it hard to make myself believe that so universal and so concrete a human activity as music should require such complicated and abstract explanations. It all seems very remote from real-life musical experience.

And then again, with the exception of certain sociologists, and some of the younger American musicologists, there is a strong tendency to work more or less exclusively within the assumptions of the Western high-art tradition and to accept them without question as universals of music. It is rare indeed in Western writing on the aesthetics of music to find so much as a glance outwards at the experience of other cultures, even as far as Western popular traditions.

I also have a problem with the writers' use of the word 'music'. One moment it is treated as if the art itself were a thing, a living thing, with powers of growth and development and action, and then suddenly, by a stealthy process of elision, the thing 'music' becomes equated with those works of music which are undoubtedly the justifiable pride and glory of the Western tradition. And then the assumption is quietly made that it is in those works, those music objects, that the nature and meaning of music reside.

And so, when we read about the effect of music—the emotions it arouses, for example—what is really being talked about is the effect of a *work* of music. And further, what is meant is specifically the work's effect on an individual *listener*, not a composer, and certainly not on a performer. In fact, performers and performance are hardly ever mentioned in writings on the meaning of music. It seems as if a performer and his performance are thought of simply as the medium through which the musical work has to pass before it reaches its goal—the listener—and the more transparent the medium the better for the musical work.

This is strange when you think about it, since you can have music without a listener, and you do not even need a composer, but without a performer there is no music. Why people should want to sing or play would therefore seem the most fundamental question of all, yet it hardly rates a mention in the aesthetics and philosophy of music.

It seems that each musical work is thought of as having an ideal platonic existence, over and above any possible performance of it. Each work is thought of as floating through history, untouched by time and social change, waiting for its ideal listener to draw its meaning out, by a process that Emmanuel Kant called disinterested contemplation. Performers, those troublesome folk, whom many composers would eliminate if they could, apparently have nothing to contribute to that meaning. They can clarify or obscure it, but the meaning has been completely determined by the composer before the performer ever sets eyes on the score. Just as an example, Stravinsky (1947), in the series of lectures entitled *Poetics of Music*, condemns what he calls 'interpretation' (by which he means any creative contribution from the performer) much as the Church condemns heresy, and he demands of performers instead what he calls 'execution', which he defines as "the strict putting into effect of an explicit will that contains nothing beyond what it specifically commands".

This attitude is only an extreme manifestation of an idea that has been with us since

the time of the Ancient Greeks, the idea of the primacy of the musical text and the subordination of performance to it.

The tenor John Potter (1998), in a very interesting new book called *Vocal Authority*, subtitled *Singing Style and Ideology*, gives us a glimpse into the social origins of this assumed primacy of the musical text, tracing it back as far as the ancient Greeks:

In such a polarized society [that of the ancient Greeks] ... two distinct strata were the norm: a free class of appreciators, consumers of broad education who formed the potential audience, and an understratum of unfree specialists ranging from artisans to gymnasts and musicians. Free men developed the science of music as an academic and philosophical discipline; practical music-making, beyond the minimum necessary for educational purposes, was the province of the unfree. This separation of music into its practical and theoretical aspects was to have important consequences for later European culture, contributing to the idea of a permanent intellectual elite in whom resides the true nature of music, a music whose existence is in the first instance a written one.

The same idea continues to dog us today. For example, Carl Dalhaus, the doyen of contemporary European musicologists, states flatly in his book *Foundations of Music History* (Dalhaus, 1982) that "The concept 'work' and not 'event' is the cornerstone of music history. Or, to put it in Aristotelian terms, the material of music history resides not in *praxis*, or social action, but in *poiesis*, the creation of forms".

The use of the words 'poiesis' and 'praxis' is a cue, on which we are all expected to murmur, "Ah yes, Aristotle" and bow our heads to the superior wisdom of the Ancient Greeks. And it is this legitimizing authority that permits historians, philosophers and musicologists, and sometimes even composers, who ought to know better, to go on burying their heads in the scores, which is where they tell us the essence of musical meaning is to be found, with scarcely a glance outwards to the real world where people actually perform and listen to music. Like Kant, writing away day after day in his musty study—I sometimes wonder what would have happened to his concept of disinterested contemplation if he had ventured out down the road as far as the nearest tavern. Or like Brahms, who, we are told, turned down an invitation to a performance of *Don Giovanni* saying he'd rather stay at home and read the score. I hate to think what Mozart, the supreme practical musician, would have had to say about that. A hearty bit of Viennese scatology, I'll bet.

The idea that musical meaning resides uniquely in musical objects bears little relation to music as it is actually practised throughout the human race. Even within the Western classical tradition the exclusive concentration on musical works and the relegation of performance to subordinate status has resulted in a severe misunderstanding of what music is really about, and an impoverishment of our experience of it. For it is not true that performance takes place in order to present a musical work; it is the other way around. Musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform.

In that real world where people actually make and listen to music, in concert halls and suburban drawing rooms, in bathrooms and at political rallies, in supermarkets and churches, in record stores and temples, fields and night-clubs, discos and palaces, stadiums and elevators, it is precisely what Dalhaus calls social action, which is to say performance, that is central to the experience of music. You do not actually need what Dalhaus calls a created form, which is to say a musical work, at all. Many of the world's musical cultures get along very well indeed without any such thing. And you don't even

need a listener, at least not one apart from the performers, who of course are always listeners as well.

So it seems to me self-evident that the place to start thinking about the meaning of music and its function in human life is not with musical works at all, but with performing and listening.

If there is anything that is clear about performing and listening it is that they are action, they are something that people do. As I thought about this I realized that if music isn't a thing but an action, then the word 'music' shouldn't be a noun at all. It ought to be a verb—the verb 'to music'. Not just to express the idea of performing—we already have verbs for that—but to express the much broader idea of *taking part* in a musical performance. As those who have read my book *Music of the Common Tongue* (Small, 1987) will know, I have taken the liberty of defining this verb. I offer it to you now, the verb 'to music', with its present participle 'musicking'—the added 'k' is no caprice but has historical antecedents—not as one of those gratuitous coinages so beloved of academics, but as a genuine tool for understanding the nature of the music act and its function in human life.

This is how I have defined it. It is quite simple. *To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance.* That means not only to perform but also to listen, to provide material for performance (what we call composing), to prepare for a performance (what we call practising or rehearsing), or to take part in any activity that can affect the nature of that style of human encounter which is a musical performance. We should certainly include dancing, should anyone be dancing—in many cultures if no-one is dancing then no music is happening—and we might even on occasion stretch the meaning to include what the usher is doing who takes the tickets at the door, and the hefty men who shift the piano around, and the cleaners who clean up afterwards, for what they do also affects the nature of the event which is a musical performance.

It will become clear as we go along how useful this verb can be, and I shall use it from now on as if it were the proper English-language verb I hope it will become.

I have to make one thing clear. To music is to pay attention in any way to a musical performance, at whatever level or quality of attention, even taking in Muzak in an elevator or supermarket, or having your ears assaulted, as mine were the other night during a fiesta, by *Carmina Burana* at a volume near the threshold of pain, that some idiot has decided will make a fit accompaniment to a fireworks display. In other words, the verb *to music* is not concerned with valuation. It is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. It concerns all participation in a musical performance, whether active or passive, whether we like the way it is being done or not, whether we consider it constructive or destructive, sympathetic or antipathetic. The word will remain useful only as long as we keep our value judgements clear of it. Value-laden uses that I have heard, such as "Everyone ought to music" or "You can't call listening to a Walkman musicking" distort its meaning, weaken its effectiveness as a investigative tool, and plunge us back into futile arguments about what music is or is not. There is a time for value judgments, of course, but they come later.

Apart from favouring the idea that music is action, the verb has other useful implications. In the first place, it makes no distinction between what the performers are doing and what the rest of those present are doing. It thus reminds us that musicking—and you see how easy it is to slip into using it—is an activity in which all those present are involved, and for whose success or failure all those present bear a responsibility. It is not just a matter of composers, or even performers, actively doing something for the

passive rest of us to contemplate. Whatever it is that is being done, we are all doing it together.

I am not so silly, of course, as to see no distinction between what the performers are doing and what the cleaners are doing; they are obviously doing different things. When we want to distinguish between them we already have an adequate vocabulary for doing so. By using the verb *to music* we are reminded that all these activities add up to a single event, whose nature is affected by the way in which each of them is carried out, and we have a tool for exploring the nature and the meanings of the event as a whole. We acknowledge that musical performance is an encounter between human beings where meanings are being generated, and that those meanings are bigger than simply the meanings of which a musical work is assumed to be the bearer. Like all human encounters it takes place within a physical and a social space, and that space makes its own meanings, which have to be taken into account as well when we ask what meanings are being generated by a performance.

And if musicking is action and not thing, verb and not noun, then we should look for its meaning not in those musical objects, those symphonies and concertos and operas, or even in those melodies and songs, that we have been taught to regard as the repositories of musical meaning. You will understand that I am not trying to deny the existence of those music objects, which would be silly, or to deny that they have meanings in themselves. But those meanings exist only in performance and are part, but only part, of the meaning of the performance as a whole.

That being so, the question that is most useful to us is not "What is the meaning of this musical work?"; no, the useful question is "What does it mean when this performance takes place at this time, in this place, with these people taking part?"

You will notice, on the one hand, that by framing the question in this way we do not have to assume the existence of a stable musical work at all. As I have said, in many of the world's musical cultures there is no such thing. But on the other hand, it does not *exclude* the possibility of a stable musical work. It just removes it from centre stage and subsumes whatever meanings it may possess into a larger meaning, that of the total event which is the performance. In this way we can consider the meaning of *all* musical activity, anywhere and at any time, and transcend the boundaries of the Western high-art tradition.

The question then arises "In what does the meaning of this human encounter that is a musical performance consist?". The answer I want to propose is this. The act of musicking brings into existence among those present a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act of musicking lies. It lies not only in the relationships between the humanly organized sounds that are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of music, but also in the relationships that are established for the duration of the performance between the participants within the performance space. These sets of relationships in turn stand for, or model, ideal relationships in the wider world outside the performance space, as they are imagined to be by those taking part: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. Those are important matters, perhaps the most important in human life, and whenever we engage in the act of musicking, even the most seemingly trivial and frivolous, we incur a responsibility towards them.

I want to make it clear what I mean. I mean that when we music, when we take part in a musical act, the relationships that we bring into existence model those of the cosmos as we believe they are and ought to be. We do not just *learn about* those

relationships, but we actually *experience* them in all their wonderful complexity. The musicking empowers us to experience the actual structure of our conceptual universe, and in experiencing it we learn, not just intellectually, but in the very depths of our existence, what our place is within it and how we ought to relate to it. We explore those relationships, we affirm their validity and we celebrate them, every time we take part in a musical performance.

There is nothing metaphysical or supernatural about this process of exploration, affirmation and celebration, nothing mystical. It is part of that natural process of giving and receiving information which links together all living creatures in a vast network that the great English anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1980) has called the pattern that connects.

All living creatures, from protozoa to human beings to sequoia trees, need to be able to give and receive information; it is a condition of being alive. The means of communication are extremely various. It may be a colour or combination of colours, a shape, a posture, a way of moving, a chemical secretion, a sound or pattern of sounds. But always the information concerns relationships, "How do I relate to this entity?". For example, is it predator, or prey, is it offspring, parent or a potential mate? This is vital information for all creatures, and how they respond to it can make the difference between life and death for them—for us, I should say.

How the stimuli that are picked up by the creature's sense organs are transformed into sensory experience is mysterious. But for our purpose it is important to recognize that, whatever the mechanism may be by which images are formed, it is an active and creative process, not mere passive reception of whatever stimuli are presented. The creature works on the stimulus and creates a meaning from it. No information can be received unless the creature is ready to receive the raw stimuli and transform them. The receiver creates the context in which the message has meaning, and without that context there can be no communication, and no meaning.

That being so, all knowledge of the world outside ourselves must derive not only from the nature of the thing outside that is being known but also from the way in which we transform the stimuli in our nervous system. Knowledge is not something that exists Out There waiting for us to pick it up, but is a relationship between the knower and the thing known. It partakes of the nature of both. There can thus be no such thing as completely objective knowledge, knowledge of the external world exactly as it is, since everything we can possibly know about it is mediated by the way we, the knowers, work on the stimuli to convert them into usable knowledge.

This fact of the irreducible element of subjectivity in all knowledge has reduced some European philosophers to something like despair. But Gregory Bateson (1980) points out that a creature that did perceive everything outside itself exactly as it was would be an automaton, without freedom or power of choice. Human beings are not completely *objective* in their knowledge of the world, but neither are they completely *subjective*, and it is in that broad gap between 'completely subjective' and 'completely objective' that human freedom and creativity arise.

So it is that even at the simpler levels of life there is room for some flexibility in the response to information. As we ascend the scale of complexity the gestures and the possibilities of response become more and more varied and complex. Posture and ways of moving—what we call body language—as well as facial expression and vocal timbre and intonation, provide in the more complex creatures a wide repertory of gesture and response. Those gestures and responses, however, still concern relationships, and in complex and contradictory creatures like human beings the gestures and responses can

be complex and contradictory also. Gestures from me to you might indicate that I love you, and hate you, and fear you and treasure you, all at the same time. Such complexities are not unknown in human relationships.

Whatever form the gestures of relationship may take, they have one thing in common. They do not state who or what the entities are that are relating. So that if I make a gesture that indicates that I dominate, or submit to, you, the 'I' and the 'you' are not stated and in fact cannot be stated. Only the relationship that unites us is stated. There are no nouns, or pronouns, in the language of biological communication, no negatives either and no past or future tense. We cannot say 'He does not submit to her' or 'She will dominate him'. The language cannot deal with relationships that are not actually happening or with entities that are not actually present. It is a here-and-now communication.

In contrast, verbal communication as it has developed, uniquely among human beings, has equipped us to deal with entities that are absent, and with past and future events, and with abstractions and with the contexts in which they occur. But unlike the language of gesture, it can deal with matters only one at a time.

This is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength in that it has made possible those analytic capacities, that step-by-step logic and that ability to compute about things, that have proved powerful tools in gaining such mastery as we have over the material world. But it is a weakness in that words in general have proved less than adequate in dealing with the complexities of our relationships with one another and with the rest of the cosmos. One thing at a time is just too slow and cumbersome for the many-layered quicksilver nature of relationships.

But the language of gesture continues to perform functions in human life that words cannot. These functions lie specifically in the exploration and the articulation of relationships, and in this function they are as precise as words are in their field. In addition to those innumerable gestures that we make and interpret every day, human beings have elaborated them over their million-year history into those complex patterns of gesture we call ritual.

Ritual is a type of organized behaviour in which humans use the language of gesture to affirm, explore and celebrate their ideas of how the relationships of the cosmos operate, and thus how they themselves should relate to it and to one another. In the concentrated and heightened time of ritual, relationships are brought into existence between the participants, which model ideal relationships as the participants imagine them to be. In this way the participants not only *learn about* the relationships but also actually *experience* them in action. In the memorable phrase of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), in the ritual act "the lived-in order merges with the dreamed-of order".

Now ritual, as we know, may bring together and orchestrate an enormous variety of what we today call artistic genres: acting and miming, dancing, musicking, designing and building, painting, sculpting, making and wearing costumes, decorating the body, cooking and eating. It can, in fact, include at one and the same time all those activities that we call the arts. But I think we're better saying it the other way around. It is not that ritual brings together all the arts, but rather it is that each of the activities we call the arts is a fragment of that great unitary and universal performance art we call ritual, and almost certainly had its origin there. Ritual is the mother of all the arts. Each of the arts is a mode in which we use the language of gesture to explore, affirm and celebrate our concepts of how we relate, and should relate, to ourselves, to one another and to the world. I should go so far as to assert that all art is performance art.

It could be that we have what we call art or the arts only when we cease to be aware of the ritual function of the activity and try to divorce it from its ritual purposes. I say we *try* to divorce it, because I believe we never can do so. No matter how secular or frivolous, or even trivial it may appear, however primitive, or crude or even incompetent it may seem, the ritual function of art is always present for those who can perceive it.

We notice that the way the arts issue from, and return to, ritual is as action, as *performance*. In the enactment of ritual it is the *making*, the *wearing*, the *exhibiting*, the *dancing*, the *musicking*, in a word, the *performing*, that is valued, not the objects that are made, or exhibited, or worn, or performed, however carefully and lovingly they have been made. The created objects are of value only in so far as they serve the ritual purpose. And we see further that if every living creature is able, needs to be able, to understand and to articulate the gestures that constitute the language of information concerning relationships, then the ability to take part in the activity we call art is not confined to a few gifted people but is part of the evolutionary inheritance of every normally endowed member of the human race.

What has musicking to do with all this? We can expect that, as a fragment of the great performance art that is ritual, the act of musicking will bring into existence a complex web of relationships for the duration of the performance. At the centre of that web are the relationships that the performers create between the sounds. Radiating out from these, and feeding back to them, are the relationships among the performers, between the performers and the listeners should there be any apart from the performers, and with the composer, should there be one apart from the performer, and with anyone else who may be present.

Broadly, the relationships of a musical performance fall into three groups. In the first group are those of the physical setting in which the performance takes place. In the second group are the relationships among those taking part, performers and listeners and anyone else involved, while in the third are those between the sounds. We shall see in a moment that these three groups of relationships themselves interrelate in complex ways. To enumerate them all would take more time than I have here (I have tried in my new book to give a somewhat more comprehensive list but even that is not by any means exhaustive). So let us just take a quick glance at some of the relationships that are brought into existence at one kind of event, a contemporary symphony concert as it might take place in a concert hall.

The modern concert hall is designed and built around certain concepts of human relationships, and, like all buildings, it has the power once it is built to impose those concepts on what takes place within it. The physical space shapes the social space. Its great size and its opulence tell us that what goes on here is socially important. It isolates everyone within it from the world of their everyday lives. The big foyer with its loose layout tells us that this is a place for socialization while the auditorium with its rows of seats all facing in the same direction tells us that this is a place for listening and paying attention only, not for socializing. The boundary of the stage forms an impassable division of the place into two, keeping some people apart and bringing others together, allowing some to dominate and others to be dominated.

When we come to the second group, the relationships between those taking part, we start to get really complex. Again let us consider a symphony concert. First there are those among the orchestral players; they can relate to one another as they play only through the notations they have before them and through the gestures of the conductor, on whom they depend to coordinate their efforts. He (almost never she—a commentary perhaps on another set of relations, those of gender) is the power centre of the

proceedings. He mediates all the relationships between the players, because he is the only one who has a complete image of the musical work before him. But even he is not a free agent since everything he does, or gets the orchestra to do, has to be justified by reference to the composer's score. The composer, ultimately, is boss, even if, as is the case more often than not, he is dead (again, it is almost always he, almost never she).

And what about the listeners? They sit still and quiet during the performance, not communicating with one another in any way, each individual alone with the sounds in the midst of the great crowd of people, not sharing the experience with their neighbours, who are quite likely strangers to them. They cannot affect the course of the performance in any way, because the set of relationships which dictates that is all located on the orchestra's platform, and we have already noted that the social barrier formed by the edge of the stage is as impassable as if it were a brick wall. Their relationship with the players is of the most distant kind, since the two groups enter and leave the building through separate entrances and never address a single word to one another.

With the third group, the relationship between the sounds, we enter an area of enormous complexity that I can hardly begin to deal with here. In general they fall into two categories: those relationships which occur in succession, over time, and those which occur simultaneously. In the first category would fall melodic and rhythmic relationships as well as tempo, while in the second are not only harmonic ones but also concern the number of sounds occurring at one time, whether one voice is leader or all voices are equal, whether the texture is unified and blended or individualistic, how much dissonance is tolerated, and so on. Then there are also relationships between simultaneous and successive relationships: how many rhythmic patterns are going on at once, for example, and a whole slew of relationships between rhythm, melody and harmony.

These three groups of relationships do not exist in isolation, but themselves interact in complex ways, in what we might, following Gregory Bateson (1987), call second-order relationships—that is to say, relationships between relationships. When we try to articulate those in words the formulation comes out so complex that we are led by the verbal bias of our culture to think they are too complex for our minds to encompass. I will try to show what I mean.

There is, for example, a second-order relationship between the relations between composer and performers, on the one hand, and the relationships between the sounds, on the other. Hence, should the composer prescribe everything the performers are to do, the performers will lack the freedom to make their own sound relationships, and their relationships to one another will not be direct but will be mediated through the notations in the score. Such second-order relationships may take some figuring out when we try to verbalize them, but they are articulated perfectly clearly in the gestures of the performance itself. Here is another one. There is a second-order relationship between the ways in which the performers relate to the listeners, on the one hand, and, on the other, the relationships between the performers and the sound-relationships they create; the more prescribed the sound-relationships, the less control the listeners have over the way in which the performers perform.

But it is when we come to third-order relationships that we really test verbal language to destruction. One set of second-order relationships between first-order relationships between, on the one hand, performers and composer, and, on the other, between performers and listeners relates in a third-order relationship to a second set of second-order relationships between the first-order relationship between the sounds on the one hand and, on the other, those between the sounds and the space in which they are played.

I bring out that virtually incomprehensible sentence not to confuse but to show what is really the crux of this paper; that while the complexity of the relationships of the performance stretches the resources of verbal language about as far as it will go, if not further, it does not begin to test the power of musicking to articulate them. It does not matter if we understand this or any other verbal formulation; in the act of musicking we are able to do it effortlessly. In musicking, in taking part in any capacity in a musical performance, we are articulating (which is to say, we are exploring, affirming and celebrating) human relationships in a way for which words are not only inadequate but also unnecessary.

What I am trying to say is this: to take part in a musical performance is to take part in a ritual whose relationships mirror, and allow us to explore, affirm and celebrate, the relationships of our world as we imagine they are and ought to be. If this idea has any validity, then current ideas of music as some kind of code for the expression, or the communication, of the emotions, or for the representation of emotions, or even, heaven help us, for the representation of the morphology of the emotions, which is the term Suzanne Langer (1957) uses, emanating from a composer to each individual listener through the supposedly neutral and transparent medium of the performance, just don't stand up.

In the first place, as I have tried to show, performance is not neutral at all but is itself suffused with a rich texture of meanings. And in the second place, to my mind the idea of music, or musicking, as the communication of emotions doesn't jibe at all with my own experience. I cannot remember ever being made happy by a happy piece of music, or sad by a sad one, and I am not even sure I could tell which was which.

Nevertheless we all know that the experience of musicking *can* pack a powerful emotional punch that must come from somewhere. Once again Gregory Bateson (1987) has an idea that can be useful to us. He suggests that emotions are not free-floating states of mind but rather are the ways in which our computations (that is the word he uses, suggesting precision and clarity) about relationships resonate in consciousness. If all creatures, from protozoa to human beings to sequoia trees, need some means of getting an answer to the question, "How do I relate to this entity?" then clearly they need some means of representing this relationship to themselves. And at least for those more complex creatures that have attained to consciousness, it is through the emotional state that is aroused that the relationship is represented.

So that when I music, it is not any built-in emotional content residing in a piece that arouses my response. My response is to the relationships of the performance. Different performances of the same piece of music can arouse different responses, including sometimes no response at all, depending on how the total set of relationships of the performance fits in with my concept of ideal relationships. When I found myself being half deafened by *Carmina Burana* the other night, I felt myself being bullied and dominated (wrong relationships) and naturally I was angry.

But when things come together in the right way, whether it is others playing or, on rare but doubly fortunate occasions, myself that is playing, I know the source of those feelings of elation and joy that can produce tears; it is the knowledge that *this* is how the world *really* is when all the dross is stripped away, and *this* is how I relate to it. The emotion that is aroused, in fact, is not the *reason* for taking part in the performance, but the sign that the performance is doing its job, the sign that for the duration of the performance the lived-in order has merged with the dreamed-of order.

It is not any old performance that will do that for us, of course. Only performances in which we, the participants, are empowered to explore and affirm and celebrate the

relationships of our world, will do. That means that the performers must explore the sound-relationships as subtly, as comprehensively and as imaginatively as they are capable of doing, and that the listeners' response must be equally imaginative and comprehensive.

The experience of musicking is much richer and more complex than conventional Western aesthetics allows, since in experiencing the relationships of the performance we are experiencing the relationships of the wider world as we conceive them to be and as we believe they ought to be. Once again, we are not *observing* those relationships from the outside but are actively *involved*, each one of us, in their creation and their maintenance.

The phrase "as we conceive them to be" is of course a vital modifier, since not everyone perceives the relationships of the world in the same way. Members of different social and cultural groups, as we know only too well, have different senses of the nature of the pattern which connects, different concepts of how we relate, and ought to relate, to one another and to the world, different senses, in fact, of who they are. That this is true even within a single society or nation-state is a truism; it is the stuff of politics. And so we need not be surprised to find that members of different social groups pattern their musicking in different ways to generate sets of relationships that model their ideal. That means not only the style of the sound-relationships they bring into existence or listen to, but also the whole way in which the performance is structured.

We might find, therefore, within a single society not one but innumerable different ways of musicking. Of course, as we might expect, there is a great deal of overlap both in musical style and in style of organization of the performance as a whole; highbrows and head-bangers have more in common than they would like to believe, since all members of a society or a nation-state have in common a number of social experiences and assumptions about relationships. That is what makes them a society in the first place.

In any case, we should understand that those taking part in different kinds of musicking are looking for different kinds of relationships, and we should not project those of one kind of performance on to another kind. Any performance must be judged on its efficacy in empowering those taking part to affirm, explore and celebrate their concepts of ideal relationships. Only the best musicking of which all those taking part are capable will do that, and only those taking part will know for sure what those relationships are. And I believe that the best musicking is done, always, by those who do the best they can with what they have. And when I say the best musicking, we should remember that there are many ways of musicking well, and the technical dexterity that is so prized in Western high culture is only one of them.

So, what can we conclude from all this? First, I think, is this: music is not a collection of works that we study and play and listen to, but is an activity, something we do. It is first and foremost performance, and if we would look for the meaning of music we should ask, not "What does this musical work mean?" but rather "What does it mean when this performance takes place at this location, at this time, with these people taking part, both as performers and as listeners?". We do not even need musical compositions—in many of the world's musical cultures there is no such thing—and we can certainly do without notation, since most of the world's musicians do not feel the need for it. But if no one is performing there is no music.

And, second, that if I am right that musicking is part of the ancient language of gesture which enables human beings, like all other living creatures, to articulate their relationships with one another and with the rest of the world, then the ability to music must be part of the evolutionary inheritance of every single human being. That is to say,

everyone, every normally endowed human being, is born with the gift of music no less than with the gift of speech. And when I talk about the gift of music I do not just mean the ability to understand, or to appreciate, someone else's utterances. Afterall, we take it for granted that every normal human being is born with the ability to make and perform their own utterances; everyone does it all the time. Such everyday transactions are of central importance in human life.

I am convinced that taking part in acts of musicking is of equal importance in human life. As a part of the ancient language of gesture it enables human beings to articulate their relationships with themselves and with the rest of the world, in ways that speech cannot. There are of course important differences between speech acts and music acts, but in this they are alike: everyone is born with the potential not only to understand them but also to make their own.

If that is so, then all musicking is serious musicking, and no one style of musicking can be said to be more serious than any other style. Within each style or tradition there may be differing degrees of seriousness, but all styles are equally serious. All performances, in whatever style, are ultimately to be judged on their efficacy as instruments for exploration, affirmation and celebration of ideal relationships, and only those who have taken the trouble to immerse themselves in the culture are in a position to make such judgements.

We can ask our questions, not just of formal concert performances, but also of the man in the bus with his Walkman clamped over his ears (he may be listening to anything from the Spice Girls to the *Ride of the Valkyrie*, but the gesture of exclusion is the same) or of the underpaid Spanish cleaning lady who sings as she mops the floor, or of the crowd singing patriotic songs at a political rally, or of ol' pals singing bawdy songs at a drunken party, or of the singing congregation at a church—or, if it comes to that, of those taking part in the Ghanaian *adzida* dance or of the players and listeners to a Balinese gamelan performance, or of the participants in any one of thousands of different kinds of musicking across the world. Any attempt to explain the meaning of musicking, and its function in human life, that does not at least try to deal with all the tremendous variety of human musicking, however strange, or primitive, or even antipathetic it might sound to our ears, isn't worth the paper it's written on.

We may feel, and we have a right to feel, that there are ways that accord with our concepts of ideal relationships and other ways that do not. The choice of ways of musicking may not be done consciously or deliberately, but it is *never* a trivial matter. It reflects always an individual's, and a society's, quest for those right relationships which most of us spend our lives seeking.

NOTE

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